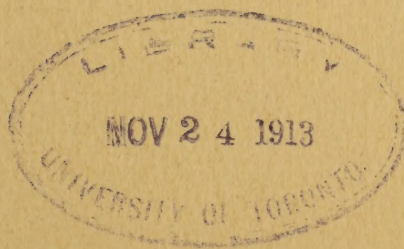




YALE UNIVERSITY PRIZE POEM

1913

by Edward Fairchild Smith.



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AT THE END

BY

EDWARD FAIRCHILD SMITH

NEW HAVEN

THE TUTTLE, MOREHOUSE & TAYLOR COMPANY

1913

PREFATORY NOTE

This poem received the fifteenth award (no prize having been conferred in 1912) of the prize offered by Professor Albert Stanburrough Cook to Yale University for the best unpublished verse, the Committee of award consisting of Professors Henry A. Beers, of Yale University, Cornelius B. Bradley, of the University of California, and Herbert E. Greene, of Johns Hopkins University.

AT THE END

SCENE: A BATTLE-FIELD.

WARRIOR.

Nay, nay I would not come; release my hand.
The field's not lost; red flies the blood, and hard
In thickest fray clash swords on casque and targe.
Begone! I know thee not! Why cling'st thou here
About my knees, impeding every step?
Out of my way! I see a comrade pressed!
The fight grows blind! Our captain's stricken dead!
Here, in such strife as this, well may one man
Decide the issue of the balanced fight.—
Ho, brother! let me draw upon thy flask;
The sun grows over-hot, and all my mouth
Is parched and cracks. (*Drinks*) Thanks, brother, thanks!
Good luck!
(*Listening*) Yea, yea, I hear thee! Keep thy courage up;
Only a moment and I'll be with thee! (*Struggles on*)

DEATH.

Come, good friend, come! Thy time is nearly spent,
And I would take thee to my sea-girt home.

WARRIOR.

Away, away! What? wilt thou not be gone?
Why hang'st thou on my arm as if of lead?
What was that mist that seemed to cross mine eyes?
Did'st thou not see it? Sooth, I must be sick!
True, I was wounded—still, 't was but a scratch,
And in these times small scratches count for nought.
Yet, would I that mine arm hung not so limp!
How heavy it has grown—aye, and my legs!
But then, I must advance, for late I heard
A trumpet give the call to charge.

DEATH.

Still bold?

Come, follow me, thou valiant one and true,
And I will lead thee to a summer sea,
Where listless breezes rustle in the boughs
Of poplars tall and whisp'ring cypresses.

WARRIOR.

What, speak'st thou still of visions by the sea?
My brow is very hot, and throbs anew;
Come, loose my casque that I may rest my head. (*Sits
down*)

(*Absently*) Yea, mother, yea! I will do that anon:
The meadows now are swimming in the heat.
'T is but a little time, and then—and then—
The eventide will cool me, and I shall—
(*Calls*) Ho, Jean! (*Starting*) What, heard I not a voice?

I must

Indeed be sick or dreaming! I will go,
And strike one more good stroke for lord and king.
Then will I go and cure this bitter wound,
Where I may hear the cooling rush of seas,
Or hear the breezes lisp among the leaves—

DEATH.

And feel her tresses brush upon thy cheek.

WARRIOR.

(*Sleepily*) What say'st thou? Ah, tell me yet more, I pray,
Of that fair island girt about by seas.

DEATH.

Nay, I will tell thee not, but come thyself
To see, and when the anguish of this wound
Is gone, thou wilt return, mayhap to fight
Again.

WARRIOR.

Then take me; I shall follow thee,
That I may soothe the aching of this wound—
And come again to fight beside my king.

DEATH.

(*Smiling*) Then come, brave warrior, (*picking him up*)
that in other lands

Thou may'st again face foes beside thy king,
And fight in battles, and such triumphs win
As thou could'st not believe. (*In revery*) Thus was it
ever—

Alike in age and youth throughout the world:
They live, and toil, and strive to be stern men,
Yet when at last they come, on me they lay
Their weary heads, and close their heavy eyes,
Like little children ready for their sleep.

(*Exeunt*)

